

## **This Odd Couple Focuses on Health**

September 14, 1984 | The New York Times

By Irvin Molotsky

WASHINGTON, Sept. 13 -The capital's Odd Couple are not the fastidious Felix Unger and the slovenly Oscar Madison in the play by Neil Simon, but rather two members of opposite ideologies who have joined to win passage of several important health measures.

One of them is Representative Henry A. Waxman, who is short, has an expanding waistline like others who have recently reached the age of 45, and is a Democrat from a heavily Jewish district in California who is accorded a 95 percent rating by the liberal Americans for Democratic Action.

The other is Senator Orrin G. Hatch, tall and so athletically lean that he does not look his 50 years, a Utah Republican who is a Bishop in the Mormon Church and who votes with the Conservative Americans for Constitutional Action 95 percent of the time.

They are poles apart on many major issues, notably on abortion and school prayer. But in 1981, in the words of a Congressional aide, "They discovered that if they worked together, they could do almost anything."

View Toward Health Policy

Both men say that their concerns for health rise above their deep political and philosophical differences. "Henry and I expect to establish a health policy that will satisfy both liberals and conservatives," Senator Hatch said the other day.

Their legislative power comes from their chairmanships, with Mr. Waxman heading the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health and the Environment and Mr. Hatch leading the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.

These are some of the measures that they have pushed along together:

A bill designed to increase the sales of lower-priced unbranded medicines has passed Congress.

A measure that mandates sterner health warnings on cigarette labels has been passed in the House and is being held up in the Senate only by a parliamentary maneuver that the bill's sponsors are confident of overcoming.

A law intended to encourage the development and marketing of medicines that do not have great commercial potential has already produced such an "orphan" drug for the treatment of Tourette's syndrome, a rare disease.

The Washington pressure cooker creates such odd couples from time to time, and Representative Waxman and Senator Hatch have specific, pointed evidence to prove it. At a birthday luncheon for Mr. Waxman at the Mayflower Hotel this week, the association of generic drug Companies thanked him and Mr. Hatch by presenting them with nightshirts with the slogan, "Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows."

The House had passed the bill the day before and the Senate was to take it up that morning, but Mr. Hatch refused to tell Mr. Waxman of its progress. A chocolate birthday cake with five red and white carnations and four candles was brought out for Mr. Waxman, and he was asked to make a wish and blow out the candles.

"Did you pass the bill?" Mr. Waxman shouted to Mr. Hatch. "I don't want to waste a wish." Mr. Hatch then announced that the Senate had passed the bill, saying he had told the chamber that "I wanted to make this my gift for Henry." Mr. Waxman, having husbanded his wish, blew out the candles.

According to a Senate aide, cooperation between the two legislators began at a House-Senate conference in 1981 at which Mr. Waxman made a strong case for the orphan drug legislation. Senator Hatch had no strong position on the measure at that point, but he did want something else, a law to benefit Utah residents who maintained that they had suffered a higher incidence of leukemia as a result of nuclear bomb tests in Nevada in the 1950's and 1960's. Each got wanted in the compromise, and the partnership was under way.

The two legislators, despite their agreements, do not try to hide their differences.

"We disagree on abortion," said Waxman, who favors the view that a woman should have the right to have an abortion. "Senator Hatch has identified with the Moral Majority, and I reject the idea that it is either moral or represents the majority."

"He is for the school amendment and I am against it. We will disagree on those issues, but we have to see that we can agree on one day and fight on the next."